

WARREN COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

COMMITTEE: HEALTH SERVICES

DATE: NOVEMBER 29, 2006

Committee Members Present:

Supervisors Sheehan
F. Thomas
Tessier
Champagne
Mason

Committee Member Absent:

Supervisor Haskell

Vacant: Town of Queensbury

Others Present:

Representing Health Services Department:

Patricia Auer, Director
Sharon Schaldone, Assistant Director, Home Care
Ginelle Jones, Assistant Director, Public Health
Services
Tawn Driscoll, Provisional Fiscal Manager
Joan Parsons, Commissioner of Administrative and
Fiscal Services
Joan Sady, Clerk, Board of Supervisors
Supervisor Sokol
Supervisor Kenny
Supervisor VanNess
Supervisor Geraghty
Katy Goodman, Secretary to the Clerk

Mr. Sheehan called the meeting to order at 9:36 a.m.

Motion was made by Mr. Mason, seconded by Mr. Tessier and carried unanimously to approve the minutes of the previous meeting, subject to correction by the Clerk.

Privilege of the floor was extended to Mrs. Auer; and she distributed copies of her Agenda packet for the meeting. A copy of the packet is on file with the minutes.

Mrs. Auer commenced with review of the Pending Items and she spoke on the status of the Telehealth Program. She stated the monitors continued to be well received and some of the short-term patients would like to be able to keep them longer. Mrs. Auer advised that during 2007, they planned to look at the potential development of a more intensive marketing and revenue generating approach through the use of a specific number of monitors. She said they would keep the Committee members updated on the plan as they moved into the New Year.

Next, Mrs. Auer discussed the Point of Care Initiative. She reported it had been eliminated from the 2007 County budget. Although, she said, they did understand the County's budgetary concerns for the upcoming year; however, they still needed to think about moving to an electronic medical record system. Mrs. Auer commented that even though they were on the forefront with Telehealth, they were definitely behind the curve without the Point of Care because it would enable the department to be more efficient in delivering its services. In addition, Mrs. Auer said without the system they would continue to have delays in billing for services and revenues in a timely manner.

Mr. Mason queried if some of the Department's revenues could be used to cover the costs to purchase the Point of Care system. Mrs. Auer responded they had tried that approach during the budget preparation process but it was not approved. She apprised Mr. Mason that 36% of the Department's costs were for mandated services, such as the Early Intervention Program and the Preschool Program, so she assumed their revenues would be used for those costs. Brief discussion followed.

Mrs. Auer noted new Supervisor Matthew Sokol, (at-large representative of the Town of Queensbury), was present today and Mr. Sheehan acknowledged her request that her administrative team introduce themselves to him. Ms. Schaldone, Assistant Director of Home Care, Ms. Jones, Assistant Director of Public Health and Ms. Driscoll, Provisional Fiscal Manager, introduced themselves to Mr. Sokol; and he acknowledged the introductions.

Relative to the Point of Care issue, Mrs. Auer noted they would continue to ask for the system so it would not be a new request for next year's budget. She commented the situation was not that the Committee members were not aware of the Initiative, but that it was a particularly terrible budget year for the County.

The next Pending Item, Mrs. Auer noted was the status of the Department's Pandemic Flu Planning Efforts. She reported they had submitted their plan as requested by the New York State Department of Health (DOH), but they had not yet received any feedback on it. Mrs. Auer stated on Saturday, November 18th, they had conducted a Point of Distribution (POD) Clinic for the First Responder Community in order to test their ability to operate three clinics simultaneously. However, she advised only 119 people participated which was not a very good number. The Clinic had also been open to surrounding Counties, she said. However, Mrs. Auer noted, the event did give them the opportunity to test their radios while going from place to place and representatives from the DOH were present and they were pleased with the Clinic. She commented she did not know what else could have been done to encourage a better turnout.

Mrs. Parsons entered the meeting at 9:40 a.m.

Continuing, relative to the POD Clinic, Mrs. Auer recalled at the last meeting they had reported that the DOH had provided 1000 doses of free flu vaccine so the shots could be offered at no cost to the First Responders who came to the POD Clinic. She explained they could not give the remaining doses out free to the public because the County had purchased the vaccine so they were looking for some places where it could be used.

Concluding the Pending Items, Mrs. Auer spoke on the status of the contract for the Early Intervention Administration grant. She recalled this grant and contract were new this year because they had been separated from the Children With Special Health Care Needs grant. Mrs. Auer advised they had not yet received the contract or any word on the status of the grant. She said she had spoken with someone from the State yesterday, who had said they would be receiving the contract. Mrs. Auer noted she had pointed out to the State representative that the

grant year was to begin October 1st and she also did not know whether they would be receiving a back-dated contract in the next few months. Mrs. Auer stated the grant was still supposed to be awarded to the Department and she had not heard otherwise about it.

Mrs. Auer proceeded with review of the New Business Items on the Agenda.

First, she requested approval of a resolution to amend Resolution No. 694 of 2005 which had authorized a contract to audit the Department's Medicaid and Medicare Cost Reports to reflect a change in the name of the auditing firm from Edwards, Williams, McManus and Ricciardelli PC, to Whittemore, Downen and Ricciardelli LLP. Mrs. Auer explained the County Attorney's Office had asked to have the Resolution amended before they sent the letter of agreement to extend the current contract with the firm.

Motion was made by Mr. Champagne, seconded by Mr. Mason and carried unanimously to approve the aforementioned request, as presented, and to authorize the necessary resolution for the next board meeting. A copy of a resolution request form is on file with the minutes.

Mrs. Auer requested approval of a resolution to renew the current contract with Greater Adirondack Home Aides, Incorporated (GAHAI), for the term of January 1, 2007 through December 31, 2007.

Mrs. Auer advised in October John Penzer, CEO of GAHAI, had sent her a letter requesting a 3% rate increase over last year's rates. She pointed out the increase was outlined on the agenda (from \$24.31 per hour to \$25.04 per hour). Mrs. Auer stated she had told Mr. Penzer that this had been a difficult year for the County and that she wanted to wait to see how the budget process evolved before she took any requests for rate increases. She apprised for last year's contract the agency had requested a 3% increase which was allowed because the agency did supply the most home health aides to the County. Mrs. Auer noted it was up to the Committee members whether or not they would want to go with the full 3% increase. However, she said, she thought the agency would accept an increase of less than 3% because she had told Mr. Penzer that was probably what would happen with the request. Mrs. Auer noted if the requested rate was reduced she thought it would directly affect the level of the home health aides' salaries.

Privilege of the floor was extended to Ms. Schaldone, and she apprised that last year when they looked at the 3% increase they had asked GAHAI to insure that the aides would receive the increase. However, she said, they found out that although the aides did receive the 3% increase it was not until July, plus they were led to believe that other people at the agency received increases in January. Ms. Schaldone apprised the agency's starting salary was \$8.25/hour with a \$.25/hour increase after one full year of employment. In addition, she said the aides were not reimbursed for the first 25 miles they drove a day which at the current mileage reimbursement rate of \$.44.5/mile for 125 miles would be about \$55/week. Ms. Schaldone expressed concern as to how at the \$8.25/hour rate the aides could afford to lose \$220 per month for the mileage. She stated this also impacted the aide services the Department provided to the northern parts of the

County. Mr. Kenny entered the meeting at 9:43 a.m.

Continuing, Ms. Schaldone referred to the aforementioned hourly rates the agency charged the Department and she said she was not comfortable that the resources were going to the aides who were doing the needed work. Mrs. Auer stated they would also be asking to renew the contracts of three other agencies that provided aides to the Department. She noted although those agencies did not provide as many aides as GAHAI, the Committee members would see that in comparison to their rates, GAHAI's rates were significantly higher as they had more administrative costs. (A chart was provided on the agenda that outlined the rates charged for providing aides by Interim Health Care, VNA (Visiting Nurse Association) of Albany and North Country Home Services).

Ms. Schaldone advised she had asked Mr. Penzer to look at the agency's mileage reimbursement program because of the aforementioned impact on the availability of aides for the northern part of the County. However, she said, at this time she did not know how the matter stood. She acknowledged at this particular time the aide coverage was a little better. Ms. Schaldone noted the Department did schedule three or four of GAHAI's aides and one had left the agency to take a job at Westmount Health Facility where the starting pay rate was \$11.76/hour with benefits. GAHAI did not provide benefits, she added.

Mr. F. Thomas suggested perhaps they should contract with one of the other agencies for all the aides they needed. Mrs. Auer responded GAHAI had more aides than the other agencies. Ms. Schaldone advised they did use a large percentage of aides from Interim and Albany VNA. She noted because North Country Home Services is located in Elizabethtown they did as much as they could with their coverage area which was North Creek and Hague. Ms. Schaldone added they did a lot more business with the other agencies than previously so they were not just giving all their business to one agency.

Discussion returned to GAHAI's request for a 3% rate increase; and Mr. Mason said he had gotten the impression that the rate could be negotiated down to a lower rate. Mrs. Auer advised she would recommend a 2% increase for this year with the provision that the aides would see some of the benefits from the increase and that stipulation should be agreed to in writing. She commented it also did not leave her with a "good taste" that they were led to believe the aides received an increase for a full year when that was not actually correct. Mrs. Auer noted she felt they should not give GAHAI the impression that the increase would just be rubber stamped and that they would not question things when they were not as proper as they might be.

Mr. Mason asked if it should be recommended that Mrs. Auer negotiate a lower percentage rate. Mrs. Auer replied they would need a specific amount to negotiate with; and Mr. Mason recommended a cap of 2% be used. Mr. Sheehan concurred with the recommendation.

Mr. Tessier asked if the agency had agreed to give the employees a salary increase. Mrs. Auer agreed they were concerned that the rate increase would just go for administrative costs and not

to the salaries. Mr. Tessier stated they would have to know what the agency's actual payroll was in order to see how much of the rate increase was going to the employees. Ms. Schaldone reiterated she would like to see the aforementioned mileage reimbursement program be changed and the aids continue to receive a 3% raise so there would be more aides available who would be willing to cover the northern part of the County.

Mrs. Auer stated she felt she should advise GAHAI that the Committee members had discussed their request at length and they were very concerned about the salaries and the mileage reimbursement situation. She also suggested the agency should be told that the request was not going to be approved even for 2% because of the County budget situation; however, because the service was so important the 2% would be approved on condition that the Committee members would be shown exactly how the increases would be managed. Mrs. Auer noted she was sure the agency would respond in writing and she would bring their response to the next Committee meeting.

Mr. Mason asked if all those stipulations could be included in a resolution; and Mr. Sheehan replied he did not think a resolution could be done now because they would have to wait for the rate to be negotiated. He asked Mrs. Auer if it would be possible to accomplish the negotiations before the next regular Board of Supervisors meeting. Mrs. Auer confirmed she felt that would be possible. She stated she thought a resolution could be approved for a potential rate increase of 2%, pending receipt of the information the Committee wanted to obtain. Then, she said she would forward the information to the Committee members.

Mr. Geraghty entered the meeting at 9:51 a.m.

Privilege of the floor was extended to Mr. Kenny, and he said he had not heard the entire conversation on this matter, but there had been similar conversations on the home health aide salary situation over the years. He remarked the concern about the humanitarian aspect of the salary issue was commendable but the impact on the County was what the costs were to the taxpayers. Mr. Kenny recalled a few years ago there was discussion on whether the other agencies could be encouraged to expand and take more of the business that had traditionally been given to GAHAI. He noted he did not know if anything had ever come of that discussion. Mrs. Auer replied they had tried to do that, but while they were doing so more agencies were opening up that provided aides so the small pool of available aides was being divided up by more agencies. Some of those agencies provided services to patients such as shopping and transportation to doctor's appointments that would be more attractive to some people who wanted to be aides compared to giving personal care such as bathing, etc., she said.

Mr. Kenny asked if, for instance, Interim Health Care could increase their staff so more aides would be available. Ms. Schaldone replied they had maximized all the agencies for home health aide and personal care aide services the Department provided to its patients. She said if he would like Ms. Driscoll, the Department's Fiscal Manager, could provide the figures for what had been paid to each agency per quarter or year. She explained when an aide was requested all the

agencies received the referral and the slots were filled on a first-come-first-served basis. Mr. Kenny asked if they had sat down with the management of all the agencies to encourage them to increase their staffs; and Ms. Schaldone confirmed they had done that. She advised there was a shortage of aides statewide. Mr. Kenny noted there had always been concerns about where the money went with GAHAI. He recalled at one time they had looked at the salaries of the agency's management.

Mr. Tessier asked what the other agencies paid their aides; and Ms. Schaldone replied she did not know, but they could find that out. Mrs. Auer stated she would obtain the salary information for the aides from the other agencies and report it to the Committee members. She advised she was concerned about the timing of approving the contracts because they needed to be in place for the beginning of the year.

Dialogue ensued between Mr. Sheehan and Mrs. Auer on how the resolutions to approve these contracts should be handled. Mr. Sheehan suggested the Committee meet again on December 15th prior to the full Board of Supervisors' meeting. Mrs. Auer said she would have the information on the contract with GAHAI and also the other providers for the meeting. The Committee members offered no objection to having a meeting prior to the December board meeting.

Mrs. Auer resumed with review of the agenda items. She requested approval of a resolution to authorize the WIC (Women, Infant and Children) Program to apply to the NYS Nutrition Council for a grant in the amount of \$1500.00 to develop a Community Health Promotion project.

Motion was made by Mr. Champagne, seconded by Mr. F. Thomas and carried unanimously to approve the aforementioned request, as presented, and to authorize the necessary resolution for the next board meeting. A copy of a resolution request form is on file with the minutes.

Mrs. Auer stated the next request was to have been for approval of a resolution to authorize the WIC Program Coordinator to apply to Wal-Mart for a Community Education Project grant. However, she explained, the grant application had to be submitted before this meeting therefore, the WIC Coordinator submitted the application and they were notified by Wal-Mart on November 27th that they would be awarded a grant in the amount of \$333.34. Mrs. Auer stated a resolution would need to be done to ratify the actions of the WIC Program Coordinator in submitting the grant application and to enter into an agreement to accept the grant funds and to amend the 2006 County budget to reflect receipt of the funds.

Motion was made by Mr. Mason, seconded by Mr. Tessier and carried unanimously to approve a resolution to ratify the aforementioned actions of the WIC Program Coordinator and of an agreement to execute the grant for the aforementioned project. The necessary resolution was authorized for the next board meeting. A copy of a resolution request form is on file with the minutes. The request to amend the County budget was referred to the Finance Committee.

Mrs. Auer requested approval of a resolution to authorize submission of an application to the New

York State Department of Health and the Dormitory Authority of the State of New York for a Health Information Technology (HIT) Grant in the maximum amounts allowed for the specified projects.

Relative to the grant, Mrs. Auer stated she did not yet know what the amount of it would be. She advised they would be working with the Hudson Headwaters Health Network (HHHN) to try to maximize whatever amount they might be eligible for. Mrs. Auer explained that should they be awarded the grant, potentially it would be used to assist with paying for a portion of the previously discussed Point of Care Initiative.

Mrs. Auer explained she had just been informed of the grant via e-mail last week which was the day before the 2007 County budget was voted on. She apprised a County match for the grant would be needed. Thus, she said she had spoken to Joan Parsons, Commissioner of Administrative & Fiscal Services, about that aspect of the grant. Mrs. Auer stated in turn Mrs. Parsons spoke with the Budget Officer, who according to Mrs. Parsons had said that he would not include the funds in the 2007 Budget, but he would be willing to support a budget amendment to authorize the County's match if the grant funds were to be awarded. Mrs. Auer advised if the Committee members did not agree with that, the Department would need to know because this was an extremely large grant to write.

Mr. Champagne asked how much the local share would be; and Mrs. Auer replied it would depend on the amount of the grant or probably about 40% of the amount the County would be eligible for. Ms. Schaldone stated the match amount could be as high as \$200,000. She apprised the original proposal for the Point of Care system was about \$310,000. Ms. Schaldone noted because the system would involve electronic signatures it could cost a little more. Mrs. Auer said there also might be a tie-in with some computer equipment they already had in use which might enable them to maximize some additional funding but that would have to be worked out. She noted someone from HHHN attended the bidders' conference on the grant and they would be meeting with them to discuss their findings on the grant.

Discussion ensued. Mrs. Parsons stated since the original dollar amount for the system was much lower than the \$310,000 just mentioned that issue had been discussed. As a result of the discussion, she advised the County Information Technology Department was willing to purchase 40 of the laptop computers through the computerization fund so that was being looked at as part of the match. Mrs. Auer concurred with Mrs. Parsons that there could be a collaboration on the match. Mrs. Parsons stated she did not think the County would be looking at funding the entire match. Ms. Schaldone noted the \$310,000 figure was on the high end. Mrs. Auer stated they would keep the Committee members informed on the various aspects of the grant as they found out more about it.

Motion was made by Mr. Tessier, seconded by Mr. F. Thomas and carried unanimously to approve the aforementioned request, as presented, and to authorize the necessary resolution for the next board meeting. A copy of a resolution request form is on file with the minutes.

Next, Mrs. Auer requested approval of a resolution to amend the 2006 County Budget to reflect changes in appropriations and revenues for the 2006 Emergency Response and Preparedness grant funding for the grant year August 31, 2006 through August 30, 2007 in the amount of \$50,000.00. She stated the contract had been awarded and executed so the budget needed to be amended to accurately reflect the way in which the funds would be utilized.

Motion was made by Mr. Champagne, seconded by Mr. Tessier and carried unanimously to approve the aforementioned request, as presented, and to refer it to the Finance Committee. A copy of a resolution request form is on file with the minutes.

Mr. Kenny left the meeting; and Mr. VanNess entered the meeting at 10:04 a.m.

Mrs. Auer requested approval of a Transfer of Funds in the amount of \$181,349.90. Ms. Driscoll reviewed the request in detail with the Committee members.

Motion was made by Mr. Mason, seconded by Mr. F. Thomas and carried unanimously to approve the Transfer of Funds, as presented, and to refer it to the Finance Committee. A copy of the Transfer of Funds is on file with the minutes.

Mrs. Auer stated usually they had not provided the Committee members with copies of their Transfer of Funds requests. She asked if the Committee members wanted copies of those requests as part of the Reports on Expenditures and Revenues that were being provided each month. Mr. Sheehan responded it would be helpful to have copies of the Transfer of Funds forms; and Mrs. Auer acknowledged the request.

Concluding the agenda, Mrs. Auer advised they had met with Mr. Sheehan prior to the budget vote to discuss with him their concerns about some issues that might come up during the forthcoming year. She stated they did understand (the new County policy) that there were not to be any requests to create new positions during 2007. Mrs. Auer said Mr. Sheehan had asked her to discuss their concerns with the Committee members so they would also be aware of them.

Mr. Sheehan spoke on the aforementioned meeting. He advised that the Health Services Department did understand how tight the 2007 County budget would be and they would be making their best effort to stay within the budget and they hoped they could do that. However, Mr. Sheehan said, they wanted the Committee members to be aware that there were some budget line items they were concerned about and that they would keep them involved throughout the year so there would be no surprises if they should go over or under their revenues and expenses.

Mrs. Auer stated they had never had to request any funds from the County's Contingent Fund budget but they could see some areas where that might have to be the case. For example, Ms. Schaldone stated when the aforementioned Point of Care Initiative was removed from the budget their appropriation for equipment was also deleted. Thus, she said if their copy machine

should stop working there would not be any funds to replace it.

Mr. Champagne asked if there would be any issues relative to personnel. Mrs. Auer responded she was concerned that the number of children who were receiving services through the Early Intervention Program was growing. She explained they had always had the opportunity to contract with other agencies to provide those services. Mrs. Auer stated they had chosen not to do that because essentially they were paying themselves which enabled them to defray some of the program costs by keeping the revenues in-house. However, Mrs. Auer advised, that affected the results of their State survey and they were found to be out of compliance with the number of cases the coordinators of those services were supposed to handle. She advised they would be surveyed again this year and they would be cited for having that situation again. Mrs. Auer noted when that occurred she would let the Committee members know so it would be on the record that they should either have someone in the Department to do that work or it would have to be contracted out.

Mr. Kenny returned to the meeting at 10:12 a.m.

Continuing, Mrs. Auer noted they had asked for a supervisory position for the Public Health Division of the Department. She stated Ms. Jones, the Assistant Director of Public Health, had 32 people who reported directly to her. They would hear about that from the State also, she said.

Ms. Driscoll stated another concern was that all travel expenses for all the County Departments were removed from the budget. Mrs. Auer explained this affected the nurses who staffed the Department's clinics because they did not use County vehicles to travel to the clinic locations, they were paid mileage. Ms. Driscoll noted the nurses would travel together and the requested appropriation was only \$4,000, but it had been reduced to \$1,000 for the year. She apprised that amount would not cover those costs for the year so there would be a shortfall in that budget code.

Copies of the Department's Revenues & Expenditures Report as of November 22, 2006 were provided with the agenda packet.

Copies of the Rabies Program Report for the 3rd quarter of the year was attached to the agenda in the agenda packet.

There being no further business to come before the committee, on motion by Mr. Champagne and seconded by Mr. Mason, Mr. Sheehan adjourned the meeting at 10:14 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Katy Goodman, Secretary to the Clerk